

B. Vietnam Becomes Major Preoccupation

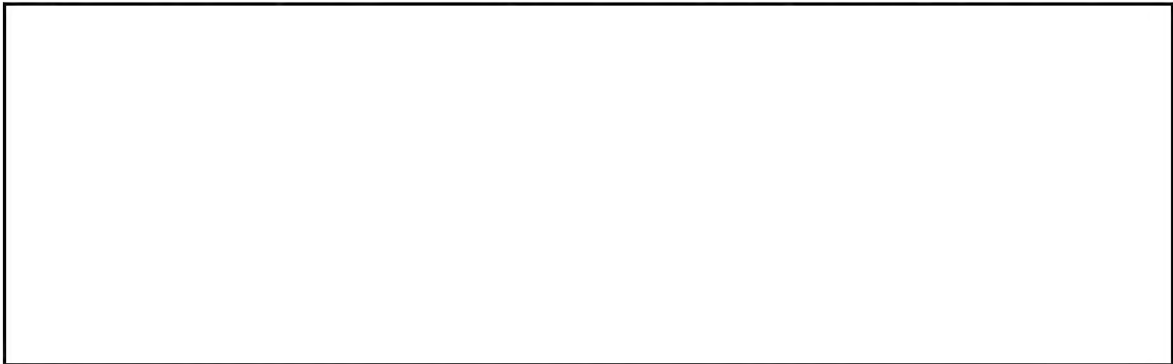
55. During the 17 months of this period, developments in Vietnam and Laos were given high priority attention by the USIB with Board actions averaging nearly one each week. The problems faced in these areas by the policy makers and the intelligence community were of a critical nature in both the political and military arenas. The assassination of President Diem and his brother on 1 November 1963 less than a month before the assassination of President Kennedy ushered in a very unstable situation in the government of South Vietnam. Then on 4 August 1964 the attack by North Vietnamese PT boats on U.S. destroyers in the Tonkin Gulf led to the initiation of U.S. air attacks on North Vietnam under the Southeast Asia Resolution of 10 August 1964. The serious nature and consequences of U.S. policy decisions stemming from these and other related developments required the continuous efforts of the USIB in furnishing intelligence support to the President and the NSC.

56. More than one third of the USIB actions during this period related specifically to Vietnam and Laos were concerned with the preparation of Special National Intelligence Estimates, many of

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which were requests from the policy makers for estimated consequences and reactions to possible U.S. courses of action.



North Vietnamese violations involved nearly one-fourth of the Board's actions. Another fourth of the USIB actions in this period were concerned with COMOR reports on intelligence requirements and collection using overhead reconnaissance to obtain essential intelligence on Vietnam and Laos. CCPC also was directed to prepare a series of studies on the overall resources and capabilities for intelligence collection on these areas. In addition consideration of the regular weekly Watch Reports resulted in a number of Board requests for special reports by the committee or the National Indications Center. Altogether the USIB during this period devoted as much of its time and effort to Vietnam and Laos as it did to any of the other major problems discussed in succeeding sections.

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57. The Board's initial actions on these areas were stimulated by an oral report by the DCI at the 23 December 1963 meeting on the visit which he and Secretary of Defense McNamara had made to South Vietnam (SVN). Mr. McCone pointed out that there was no real organized government at that time in SVN, even though it was ostensibly being run by the Military Revolutionary Committee (MRC). The lack of an outstanding individual to lead the and/absence of administrative experience within the MRC were ominous indicators, which made the political stability of the new government subject to serious doubt. He noted that information furnished the U.S. by SVN authorities during the past two years had been inaccurate and misleading. Mr. McCone generally concluded that the problem of overcoming the Vietcong (VC) movement by the government of South Vietnam (GVN) was formidable and difficult but not impossible. In his judgment, there was more reason to doubt the outcome than to be optimistic, and Secretary McNamara was even more pessimistic. 89/

58. At its 8 January meeting, USIB approved a proposal by the Chairman of BNE for a full-dress estimate on North Vietnam (DRV) for Board consideration in mid-February. 90/ On 5 February after discussing the Watch Report item on South Vietnam,

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Mr. McCone indicated great concern and the urgent need for a new appraisal of the current situation in Southeast Asia, while concentrating on South Vietnam in view of the recent military coup in which General Khanh ousted General Minh from power in SVN. The Board agreed that a memorandum or SNIE should be prepared on an urgent basis. 91/ These two actions were the forerunner of USIB deliberations during this period leading to the issuance of twelve of the most significant estimates dealing with Vietnam and Laos, which will be summarized below.

59. The urgent estimate on 'Short-Term Prospects in Southeast Asia' was approved by the Board on 12 February 1964. The estimate noted that recent developments in that area raised the question whether the situations in South Vietnam and Laos might be on the verge of collapse. Even with current U.S. assistance it was believed that, without marked improvement in the effectiveness of the South Vietnamese Government and armed forces, SVN had at best an even chance of withstanding the insurgency menace during the next few weeks or months. If present trends in Laos were not checked, there would be continued erosion of the non-Communist position there. The situation might deteriorate rapidly, and could take a turn which would further improve the VC position in SVN.

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Dramatic new Chinese Communist (ChiCom) intervention in
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Vietnam or Laos was unlikely. / DRV was stepping up support to the
Pathet Lao (PL) and might do so for the VC, perhaps with increased
ChiCom material assistance. The Communist hope in SVN would
be sufficient quick victories before General Khanh's new govern-
ment could bring its military potential to bear, to undermine the
SVN will to resist, and to induce the U.S. to consider a negotiated
settlement its only feasible option. Developments elsewhere
in Southeast Asia, save in Cambodia, thus far had little impact
on those in Vietnam and Laos, but the outcome of the present war
in SVN would have a serious effect on the future willingness of
governments in Southeast Asia to adopt anti-Communist, rather than
neutralist, stances. 92/

60. The previously scheduled estimate on 'The Outlook for
North Vietnam' was amended and approved on 4 March, while a
Post-Mortem prepared with the estimate was withdrawn at that
time and a subsequent version approved on 15 April (which will be
discussed in later paragraphs on CCPC activities). This estimate
at
expressed the belief that DRV leaders looked / Communist prospects

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with considerable confidence, probably feeling that the GVN will to resist was waning and that the same might be true of the U.S. The DRV might seek to speed this process by stepping up VC tactics of pressure and terror, but would stop short of introducing sizable DRV military units into SVN lest this bring about a major U.S. military retaliation. In Laos, the DRV would protect positions already achieved and support PL efforts to erode the non-Communist position, but would seek to avoid initiatives that would provoke U.S. military intervention. DRV external successes had been achieved despite important internal problems and vulnerabilities, including food shortages, an widespread apathy, and/economy overcommitted to heavy industry at the expense of agriculture and heavily dependent on Bloc aid. It was believed that the personal dominance of Ho Chi Minh masked differences within the leadership which would be sharpened after his death. These problems and vulnerabilities did not threaten the regime's control at home nor materially hamper its present or somewhat higher level of effort against SVN and Laos. The DRV probably could not sustain large-scale military involvement such as open invasion, without considerable

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increases in ChiCom or Soviet aid. The Sino-Soviet split posed a painful dilemma to the DRV. While powerful motives avoid impelled it to/taking sides, efforts had moved the DRV progressively closer to the Chinese position, but Hanoi probably did try to maintain as cordial relations with Moscow as circumstances permitted. 93/

61. The next estimate was the first in which the USIB was requested to estimate the probable consequences of certain U.S. actions with respect to Vietnam and Laos. In this case the policy makers provided assumptions regarding certain U.S. actions against the DRV and Communist-held Laos with the objectives of inducing the DRV to bring about a major reduction of VC insurgency activity in SVN and to respect the 1962 Geneva agreement on Laos. These actions, primarily air and naval, would begin with GVN (US-assisted) operations against the DRV and Communist-held Laos, and might subsequently involve overt U.S. military actions. On a graduated scale of intensity, they would range from reconnaissance, threats, cross-border operations, and limited strikes on logistical targets supporting DRV efforts in SVN and Laos; to strikes (if necessary) on a growing number

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of military and economic targets in the DRV. In the absence of Communist China, all-out attacks in the DRV or / the measures did not involve attacks on population centers and resort to nuclear weapons. These actions would be accompanied by such U. S. moves as: (a) conveying the limited nature of U. S. intentions,



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(c) giving evidence of U. S. seriousness by readying and deploying strong U. S. strike units - naval, air, and ground assault - to the Western Pacific and South China Sea, (d) increased military support including air defenses to SVN, and (e) acting diplomatically to avert a new Geneva conference at least until these actions had improved the U. S. bargaining position.

62. The Conclusions of this estimate began by noting that, in response to U. S. preparatory and low-scale actions, Hanoi would probably agitate world opinion against the U. S., hoping for a new Geneva conference or UN action to result and bring cessation of attacks. The DRV while taking precautionary moves would order the VC and PL to refrain from dramatic new attacks, and might reduce the level of insurrections for the moment.

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Communist China and the USSR would support these courses. The Communist's line would probably be that a conference should stabilize the situation in SVN and Laos, while their intention would be to preserve Communist gains and assets in those countries and resume insurrectionary campaigns later. If these initial responses did not succeed and attacks on DRV continued, the Communists were likely to intensify political action efforts against the U.S. course, intermittently stepping up the tempo of insurrections in SVN and Laos while seeking a negotiated settlement. If these tactics failed and the attacks broadened with the DRV beginning to suffer considerable destruction, Hanoi's leaders would ask themselves whether these tactics were worth the destruction of their country. While unable to set any odds for the DRV course at this juncture the estimators inclined to the view that they would lower their negotiating terms in the interest of preserving their regime, expecting to be able to renew the insurrection at a later date.

There would nevertheless be a significant danger that the DRV would fight, / believing that the U.S. would still not undertake a major ground war or that if it did, it could ultimately be defeated by the successful methods used against the French. Communist China

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not wish almost certainly would/ to become involved in hostilities with U.S. forces, accordingly proceeding with caution while making threatening gestures. There was probably not high risk of ChiCom ground intervention unless major US/GVN ground units moved into the DRV or Communist-held Northern Laos, or possibly the Chinese had committed their air and subsequently suffered attack on CCAF bases in China. The USSR would make propaganda and political efforts in Hanoi's behalf and probably offer weapons and air defense equipment, but would refrain from military actions from the area and not provoke a crisis with the U.S. elsewhere. The primary concern of the USSR would be to exert its influence for a negotiated settlement without prejudicing future relations with Hanoi. Finally it was estimated that clear-cut achievement of the stated U.S. not objectives would signify/that the Communist threat in Southeast Asia was removed, but simply that time had been gained for further constructive action to deal with the threat. The U.S. commitment itself would improve anti-Communist morale and the chances for such action. On the other hand, to the degree that the consequences of U.S. actions were ambiguous or unsuccessful, there would almost certainly be a strong tendency for morale and discipline in SVN and

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Laos to deteriorate rapidly, perhaps more than if the U.S. had not begun its intensified effort. Such deterioration would be felt generally through non-Communist Asia. 94 / During the rest of 1964 there were two other estimates on the situation within South Vietnam, particularly with respect to continued deterioration. The first estimate as of 8 September 1964 assessing the chances for an established government in South Vietnam was prompted by a series of unsettling changes in the government during August. After discussing the political situation and appraising the politically influential individuals and principal power factors in South Vietnam, the estimate concluded that the present odds were against the emergence of a stable government capable of effectively prosecuting the war in SVN. Yet the situation was not considered hopeless since, if a viable regime could evolve from the present confusion, it might even gain strength from the release of long-pent pressures and the sobering effect of the current crisis. Of the men on the scene General Khanh probably had the best chance of mustering sufficient support to restore a reasonably stable and workable government. 95 / Five days after that estimate was approved,

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there was an abortive coup , following which General Khanh made sweeping changes in the military command and established a council to prepare a new constitution. In light of these new developments another SNIE was issued on 1 October 1964 which examined the situation since early September and assessed its implications for the U.S. Citing the continued deterioration, it noted that a coup by disgruntled SVN military figures could occur at any time. In any case it was believed that conditions favored a further decay of GVN will and effectiveness. The likely pattern would be increasing defeatism, paralysis of leadership, friction with Americans, exploration of possible lines of political accommodation with the other side, and a general petering out of the war effort. It was considered possible that the civilian government promised at the end of October could improve GVN esprit and effectiveness, but based on present indications that was unlikely. It was not believed that the Viet Cong would make any early effort to seize power by force of arms, since it was doubted that they had the capability for such a takeover. They would however continue to exploit and encourage the trend toward anarchy, looking for emergence of a neutralist coalition government which they could dominate. 96 /

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63. On 9 October 1964 USIB approved another estimate in response to a request by the policy makers for probable communist reactions to certain possible US/GVN courses of action. This SNIE began by assessing the current Communist view of the Indochina situation, stating that North Vietnam and Communist China undoubtedly felt that present trends in SVN were much in their favor since they anticipated a political vacuum forming which they could soon fill with a "neutralist" coalition government dominated by pro-Communists. The Communists also saw a temporary stalemate in Laos which they viewed as a secondary theater in which their major concern was to keep the corridor and areas bordering DRV and China in Communist hands. For these reasons it was believed that they were willing for the time being to accept the Laos situation as it was. Both there and in SVN they wished to avoid actions which might risk altering the present apparently favorable campaign to undermine the GVN. While seeking to exploit the deterioration in Saigon, they probably would avoid actions unduly increasing the chances of major U.S. response against DRV or Communist China. The estimate was almost certain that both Hanoi and Peiping were anxious not to become involved in the kind of war in which the great weight of U.S. superior weaponry could be brought against them. Moreover they could not be sure that the U.S.

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would not use nuclear weapons against them. It was estimated that at present both Hanoi and Peiping would persist in support of the VC even at the risk of limited U.S. retaliation against the DRV, probably on the calculation that victory was near in the South and they could through political counteraction prevent prolonged or expanded U.S. attacks in the North. The limited U.S. response to the Tonkin an Gulf incident probably lessened Communist fear of/early major U.S. move to bring the war to the North. On the other hand, natural caution plus ideological bias made the Communists highly suspicious of the U.S. so that they had serious concern that the U.S. might carry the war to the North and both had taken defensive measures for this contingency. While further actions by Hanoi and Peiping would be based on estimated U.S. intentions, it was possible that they could come to believe that the SVN situation had become so fragile that an all-out VC effort aided by increased personnel would topple the anti-Communist GVN before the U.S. could take major action against the North. Whether they made such an effort, they would continue to work for a their longstanding goal of/neutralist coalition government dominated by Communists. The USSR was probably uneasy about this situation and, if tensions increased, the Soviet interest would probably be to contain or reduce a crisis.

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64. Following this overall assessment of the Communists' viewpoint of this situation, this estimate then expressed the Board's views on the specific U. S. courses of action and probable responses. These courses ranged from resumption of destroyer patrols or maritime operations off the DRV coast, to air action or ground operations against infiltration associated targets in the Lao panhandle and finally to a systematic pattern of gradually intensifying U. S./GVN attacks against targets in the DRV itself, including infiltration routes and military and economic targets. The attacks would not include use of nuclear weapons or U. S. ground forces. The program would be combined with communicated assurances that U. S. objectives were confined to eliminating outside Communist support and guidance of the VC and PL insurrections. On the first two types of U. S. actions, the estimate generally anticipated a limited Communist reaction unless an attack by the U. S. against bases in Communist China were involved. With respect to the intensified U. S. courses of action, the estimated DRV and ChiCom reactions generally corresponded to those contained in the previous May 1964 estimate (paragraphs 61 and 62 above). If U. S. attacks continued despite the initial Communist effort referred to in the previous estimate, two possible types of reactions were presented. In the first case, the DRV might calculate that the VC could stop their military attacks for the time

being and renew the insurrection at a later date. The DRV would then press for a negotiated settlement in the South and an international conference. They would not however make any meaningful concessions such as effective international inspection of infiltration routes. In the other case the Communists might embark on a bold course feeling that the prize to be won by all out attacks on SVN outweighed any damage suffered from U.S. attacks on the DRV. The DRV would then carry on the fight and send its armed forces on a large scale to Laos and SVN. On balance, the estimate inclined toward the view that the DRV would choose the first more conservative course on the grounds they were only giving up a little time in return for avoiding damage to their country and escaping the risk of further escalation. It was noted however that there was substantial danger that the DRV might choose a more aggressive course, and the State Member of USIB expressed a dissenting view that the DRV would choose that course. The final conclusion of the estimate was that, even if the intensified U.S. actions succeeded in halting outside support to the VC, the principal accomplishment would not be a solution to the larger problem of South Vietnam, but rather the buying of time to continue U.S. efforts to establish a viable regime in the South and to deal with indigenous VC insurgency. 97 /

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65. The next SNIE on Vietnam and Laos was initiated as a result of ominous developments reported to USIB in an oral briefing

element of a North Vietnamese division from the DRV to an area in Laos near the SVN border caused Mr. McCone to request the NIC to compile and collate all indicators of Communist military actions in the Southeast Asia area for study by the Board. 98/ USIB consideration at its 22 January meeting of this NIC study together with a CIA memorandum on Communist military posture and capabilities vis-a-vis Southeast Asia resulted in (a) agreement that a SNIE be produced urgently on the near-term prospects for Indochina, and (b) direction for the preparation of a coordinated USIB intelligence memorandum based on the above mentioned CIA memorandum. 99/ This memorandum as approved by the Board on 26 January noted significant Communist troop movements in Laos and although DRV forces there were reinforced each year after the rainy season, the force was further to the South and the totals probably exceeded those in recent years. It concluded that this deployment had improved Communist capability to defend their position, and their capability to undertake offensive operations and to supply reinforcements for the VG. 100/

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66. The requested SNIE on "Communist Military Capabilities and Near-Term Intentions in Laos and South Vietnam", was approved by USIB at its 4 February 1965 meeting. The estimate cited a gradual buildup over several years which had given ChiCom, DRV, PL and VC forces potent military capabilities in and near Laos and SVN. The purpose of these new deployments was believed to be improvements of military capabilities where U.S.-supported pressure had increased as in the Laos panhandle and in the air over the DRV. The Communists also hoped to deter the U.S. from expanding the war to the DRV. The deployments did not appear to be a prelude to a major change in Communist military activity in Laos or Vietnam such as an overt offensive. Increased air defense capabilities, including the / introduction of 50 fighters into the DRV and increased Chinese air / strength near the border, were believed to be responsive to a similar / U.S. buildup in the area. It was not believed that the fighters would be used for surprise raids against Laos or northern SVN but would certainly be used against air strikes on the DRV. The troop reinforcements from the DRV had increased offensive capabilities for launching ground activity in Laos during the dry season. While VC forces in SVN had been appreciably augmented during the past year, they had not yet willingly engaged

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GVN regular units except when the VC outnumbered the GVN. Unless GVN military capabilities deteriorated sharply the chances were less than even that the next four or five months would see prolonged offensives. While /Hanoi and Peiping were somewhat less apprehensive about possible U. S. attacks on the DRV, they were believed to be determined to continue present policies in Laos and SVN. While not yet ready for a general offensive, they would continue support of insurrectionary forces and prepare to exploit any new opportunities. The USSR was believed to be hoping to rebuild influence in Hanoi and deter the U. S. from expanding hostilities, while also hoping that the DRV would avoid actions provoking U. S. reprisals or further escalation. It was noted however that this estimate of what the Communists probably would do militarily in the near-term falls far short of what they could do against indigenous forces if the latter were not reinforced from the outside. 101/

67. At the same 4 February 1965 Board meeting the USIB also approved a SNIE on "Short-Term Prospects in South Vietnam", which assessed significant political forces and attitudes there and estimated prospects for the next month or so, in light of the recent removal of Premier. Huong by a cooperative arrangement between the Buddhists under Tri Quang and the military under General Khanh. Recent events in Saigon had underlined the fact that apart from the Communists / ^{and} U. S. presence, the military

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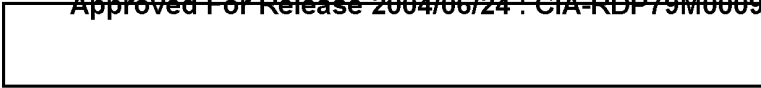
establishment and the Buddhists were the primary political forces in SVN, with U. S. political leverage at a low point. Both the military and the Buddhists suffered from political and personal rivalries but, while power rested with the military, the Buddhists were strong enough to make unworkable new political arrangements their leaders opposed. In assessing the near-term prospects, it was noted that the present arrangements were temporary and there was a faint chance in the ensuing weeks for improved political stability. However tolerable stability could only be achieved with a central government acceptable to the majority of the important military and Buddhists, which was not judged likely. Nor was it likely that a National Assembly, if convened in March, would devise a more permanent structure. If both these contingencies were met, a stronger base might evolve for prosecuting the counterinsurgency effort, but the odds on such an outcome were considerably less than even. Extreme nationalist sentiments, whipped up recently would cause considerable complications for the U. S. effort. The chances had increased that nationalist sentiments, together with war weariness and frustrations, could take a pro-neutralist turn which the Communists would endeavor to exploit. On the other hand a vigorous nationalism identified with an

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indigenously devised government reflecting local political realities would be an essential ingredient for any dynamic and successful counter-insurgency effort. 102/ A week later the USIB considered an estimate on Communist reactions, particularly Soviet reactions, to a U.S. course of sustained air attacks on North Vietnam. This U.S. course which started with a public declaration linking this policy to the entire range of VC guerrilla and terrorists activity in SVN, made clear that the US meant to go beyond specific reprisals for individual VC action and to continue air attacks until the threat to South Vietnam had been reduced to tolerable levels. It was believed that the Soviet response to this US program would consist both of a vigorous diplomatic and propaganda effort to bring the US to the conference table, and the provision of military support to the DRV. While this support would include anti-aircraft and radars the DRV would also press for surface-to-air-missiles (SAMS) or advanced jet fighters which would at present have to be installed and operated by Soviet personnel. While the USSR would recognize the vulnerability of missile sites and fighter bases to US attack, on balance the chances were considered about even that the Soviets would provide some SA-2s ways to the DRV, doing so in / calculated to minimize the initial risks. With these increased risks the USSR would seek means to curb the

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conflict both with threats against the US and attempts to mobilize pressures to the US to negotiate. Elsewhere in the world Soviet general policy would harden against the US, but it was unlikely that they would deliberately provoke a major crises in some other area. The new US policy would not lead Hanoi to restrain the VC, and it would probably maintain the current intense levels of activity or even step up the pressures in Laos. If the US persevered however and more damage was inflicted on the DRV, the chances of reduced VC activity would rise. China would be violent in castigating the new US course, with a fair chance at the outset of introducing limited Chinese ground forces as volunteers into the DRV. Introduction by China of large-scale ground force , combat units into the DRV or northern Laos could be possible but unlikely in the early stages. If the US program continued and inflicted severe damage on the DRV the chances of such a movement would rise. It was thought that China, conscious of the danger of major US attacks on its territory, probably would not take this step, by all USIB Members except the State Member who believed that the chance of such an introduction of Chinese ground forces into the DRV or northern Laos was considerably higher. Only three airfields, all in the northern part of the DRV, were fully capable of sustaining jet fighter operations, which created difficulties in engaging US/GVN

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air attacks in the southern part of the DRV. The Communists also
that
recognized/US retaliation against these air fields would be
feasible and effective. Despite these limited capabilities it was
estimated that the Communists probably would employ the fighters
based in North Vietnam against the US air attacks. If these air
attacks reached the northern DRV, it was believed China might
react over the DRV with fighters from its own bases, although the
State Member of USIB believed that China would probably react
in that manner. It was thought unlikely that the Communists would
react by launching air attacks against the SVN from the DRV or
Chinese bases. If US attacks inflicted severe damage and the US made
clear it would reduce or cease attacks in return for a sharp reduction
of VC activity in SVN, the DRV might order such a reduction, using
the ensuing calm to press for a negotiated cease-fire and international
conference, and at the same time use the respite for a major buildup
assisted by its allies. It was believed however that policy coordination
involved
among the three Communist countries/would be chronically imperfect
at times
and occasionally erratic, so that their policy and reactions would/be
faltering and uncertain and at others bold to the point of rashness. 103 /

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68. The following week on 18 February 1965 the USIB issued a Supplement to the above estimate which noted that US air attacks on the DRV had added another ingredient to an already intricate and complex situation, causing Communist reactions ^{not} to be the product of the attacks alone, but of numerous other factors which could not be estimated. Specifically this Supplement believed that DRV/VC reaction to a few more air attacks like those of early February would probably be to continue pressures in the south on the present scale, although it was possible but not probable that they might refrain for a week or two from direct attacks on US installations. The ChiComs would almost certainly encourage the DRV in a more militant course, but would not intervene in Vietnam with substantial military force at this stage. However, reaction to a ^{declared} / and sustained US program of bombing in the North would probably be greeted in Hanoi with mixed feelings of trepidation and skepticism. The Communists would apply pressure to make the US desist, and probably threaten dire consequences to US interests in the area. ChiCom threats would be more ^{If} insistent, and VC attacks would probably continue, even despite these pressures the US continued its attacks and damaged important economic or military assets, the DRV might decide to intensify the struggle, accepting the destructive consequences in the North in the expectation of early victory in the South. It seemed to all of the USIB

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Members (except State) somewhat more likely that the DRV would decide to make an effort to secure a respite from US air attack, especially if the US had indicated that such a respite would follow a sharp reduction of VC activity. The State Member however believed this DRV course of action less likely than the preceding course of intensifying the struggle. It was agreed that the Chinese Communists would almost certainly be willing to support the DRV even in the most militant courses of action. Other possible but unlikely Communist reactions which could not be ignored were: (a) a large-scale DRV invasion of SVN and/or Laos, (b) air attacks on US aircraft carriers or South Vietnamese airfields or (c) a major crisis started by the ChiComs elsewhere on the periphery of China. / once major US attacks destroyed industrial and military targets in the Hanoi-Haiphong complex, the DRV would probably carry on the fight and send its own armed forces on a large scale to Laos and SVN. As to the Soviet ingredient, it was believed likely that Soviet promises of aid to DRV defenses along with the fact of Soviet reinvolverment would make the DRV leaders somewhat more confident and aggressive. 104 /

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69. On 19 March 1965 the USIB completed a further estimate requested by the policymakers on "Probable Communist Reactions to Deployment of a Republic of Korea (ROK) Combat Division for Base Security Duty in South Vietnam". The Board did^{not} believe that introduction of one ROK combat division into SVN for static defense purposes would provoke Communist China, North Korea, or North Vietnam overtly to invade South Korea or SVN. Neither did it believe that this action would in itself change Communist attitudes toward negotiations, or lead to a slackening of the insurrection in SVN. As to the interpretation the Communists would put on this action, they would almost certainly estimate that it ^{would} not in itself significantly alter the military situation. They might consider that it portended a substantial buildup of foreign forces - e.g. Chinese Nationalist, Thai, Philippine and US - for ground combat. In any case they would try to discourage such a buildup. The Communists would probably supplement their propaganda with some sort of actions such as protests in South Korea, military movements in North Korea and/or VC terrorist efforts and military harassment against the ROK forces. It was considered unlikely that North Korean volunteers would be sent to the DRV although it was possible that some technicians or anti-aircraft personnel might be brought in. Communist China might try to scare off further such moves

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in SVN by destroying ChiCom forces toward the DRV border, but would not do much else. The introduction of a ROK division might cause the DRV to press the USSR for more and quicker military aid, to which the USSR might agree without increasing the risks of direct Soviet involvement. 104a/

70. At the last USIB meeting chaired by Mr. McCone on 28 April 1965, the USIB approved a SNIE requested by the Director of the Joint Chiefs of Staff which addressed Soviet/ChiCom reaction to US conventional air attacks against the mainland of China. While this estimate in its entirety/the situations in Vietnam and Laos, the Terms of Reference assumed that the initial US strike was in response to direct and overt attacks by Chinese fighter aircraft from Chinese bases against US forces bombing in North Vietnam. The estimate was divided into three sections which assumed a sequence of events, involving an estimation of the nature and extent of the hostilities. The first section assumed that the first US strike/against the fighter base or bases from which the Chinese attacks were launched, with the US objective limited to making the Chinese cease their attacks. It was believed that the initial US retaliatory attack would not cause the Chinese to discontinue their air attacks against the type of US bombings of DRV targets that caused the initial encounter. If Chinese attacks

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continued and the US continued to retaliate against Chinese fighter bases, the Chinese would try to defend themselves and put the US under more pressure to halt all bombing, such as feelers for negotiations, new threats, and further military deployments. In seeking to avoid further escalation, the chances were considered less than even that the Chinese would attack US carriers or operational bases. The main sharp intensification of the Communist reaction would be/ struggle in South Vietnam. It was an air unlikely however that the Chinese would continue such/ war with the were necessary US for very long before deciding to take whatever political steps/to halt the conflict, or to shift their most effective weapon, a ground offensive. It was likely that Peiping would make its choice between these alternatives sometime before its capabilities in South China for supporting air action had been completely destroyed. There was almost an even chance that the Chinese would choose to break off the battle and make political moves to dissuade the US from continuing air its bombing of the DRV. On balance however it was thought somewhat more likely that they would make a major military response to the continuation or expansion of US strikes against China. (The State Member of USIB believed that this military response was much more likely than the preceding use of political moves.) ChiCom forces would probably move into the DRV and Northern Laos. DRV forces with Chinese support would probably open an offensive against SVN.

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Thailand would also be threatened if its bases were used in air attacks against China. These military moves might be accompanied by probing for negotiations. The principal Soviet aim would be to halt the escalation, hoping to impress the US that the USSR had no choice but to support its ally. Moscow however would also try to restrain the Chinese by privately indicating to them that they could not count on the USSR to use its own forces or nuclear power to support China's war in Southeast Asia. The Soviets however were likely to supply China with military equipment of a strategically defensive character. It was possible but unlikely that the Soviets, by putting ^{important} some/ US or Western interest in jeopardy elsewhere, would try to force the US to pause or reverse its course in Vietnam and China. While growing US attacks against the DRV might cause Hanoi to believe that its fate was becoming subordinate to the larger struggle, it was not believed that the differences between Peiping and Hanoi would impair the present degree of cooperation in the war effort.

71. The second section of this estimate assumed that the US expanded its air strikes to include other military targets in South China. The first US strikes at other targets would probably bring on, if it had not already occurred, an escalation of the war including DRV offensives against the South. This expansion of US bombings would probably convince the Chinese that attacks on

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northern China would soon follow. If they had not already attacked US carriers or operational bases, they would probably do so, as well as moving Chinese troops into North Vietnam or Laos. It was possible that regular Chinese forces would move into South Vietnam. It was not believed that the Chinese would counter expanded US bombing action by initiating large-scale fighting outside Southeast Asia, although it was possible that Peiping would try to renew the war in Korea as a means of bringing the USSR into the conflict. It was not believed that these US attacks would unite Moscow and Peiping in a solid alliance but the Soviets would feel a strong desire to deter the US and a necessity to display solidarity toward a socialist ally under attack, primarily by intense propaganda and some demonstrative incidents. It was believed that the Soviets would be inhibited from generating crises elsewhere, and unlikely to openly undertake direct engagements with US forces in the absence of a direct threat to Soviet territory or the existence of a Communist regime in China.

72. The final section of this estimate was concerned with the Chinese reactions to extensive US bombing throughout China. Long before the US air campaign reached attacks on hundreds of targets of major military significance throughout China, the Chinese would have

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felt compelled either to engage the US in large-scale hostilities or to move openly toward at least temporary conciliation. US bombing throughout China would almost certainly cause Peiping to conclude that the US was determined to wage a full-scale war, perhaps including eventual use of nuclear weapons. Thus there was a chance that the Chinese, if they had still deferred a choice, would then decide it was necessary to halt the conflict and shift for a time to political tactics. It was believed however that they would probably respond with a combination of major military moves in Southeast Asia. Further, since the US had demonstrated a readiness to bomb North China, Peiping would probably judge that a general showdown had arrived and would engage the US with all the forces at its disposal. At this level of crises, the USSR would have to consider on the one hand the possibility that the existence of a Communist regime in China was in jeopardy, and on the other the danger of nuclear war. The USSR would almost certainly make a considerable effort as an emergency to sustain Chinese war fighting capabilities. At the same time it would make a maximum effort to stop the war through political action, particularly by mobilizing world opinion against the US and persuading China to negotiate. Beyond this so much would depend upon the

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circumstances in which the crisis had developed that Soviet reaction could not be anticipated. The Soviets would probably still believe that the US was not bent on attacking the USSR, and hence ^{they} would not attack US forces outside China, initiate the use of nuclear weapons or provide them to China. It was believed that Soviet actions would be calculated to limit the risk to further escalation, but it was not sure that Moscow would correctly calculate these risks. 105/

73. These estimates reflect the crucial nature of the political and military developments and decisions concerning Vietnam and Laos during this period. The uncertain and unstable political situation in South Vietnam raised serious questions regarding the prospects for an effective government. After the initial turmoil following the Diem assassination, however, the period ended with some measure of improvement with the cooperative arrangement between the military under General Khanh and the Buddhists under Tri Quang. In the military sphere, there was continued escalation of the war by all of the opposing forces involved in both Vietnam and Laos, resulting in the initial commitment following the Tonkin Gulf incident of organized U. S. forces in combat first in air attacks on the DRV and then during the spring of 1965 in the dispatch of U. S. ground forces to South Vietnam. The intelligence estimates and other reports by the USIB during this

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violated these agreements which called for complete withdrawal of all Communist forces from the South, and non-interference in the South's internal affairs, as well as a prohibition against DRV personnel crossing the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) into SVN. Since 1955, the

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believed however that Hanoi direction to the VC largely concerned policy and general plans, while individual tactical activities apparently were left to the VC commands for decision. There was clear evidence of DRV plans to infiltrate hard-core Communist cadres into SVN, possibly as many as 10,000 VC cadres since 1960.

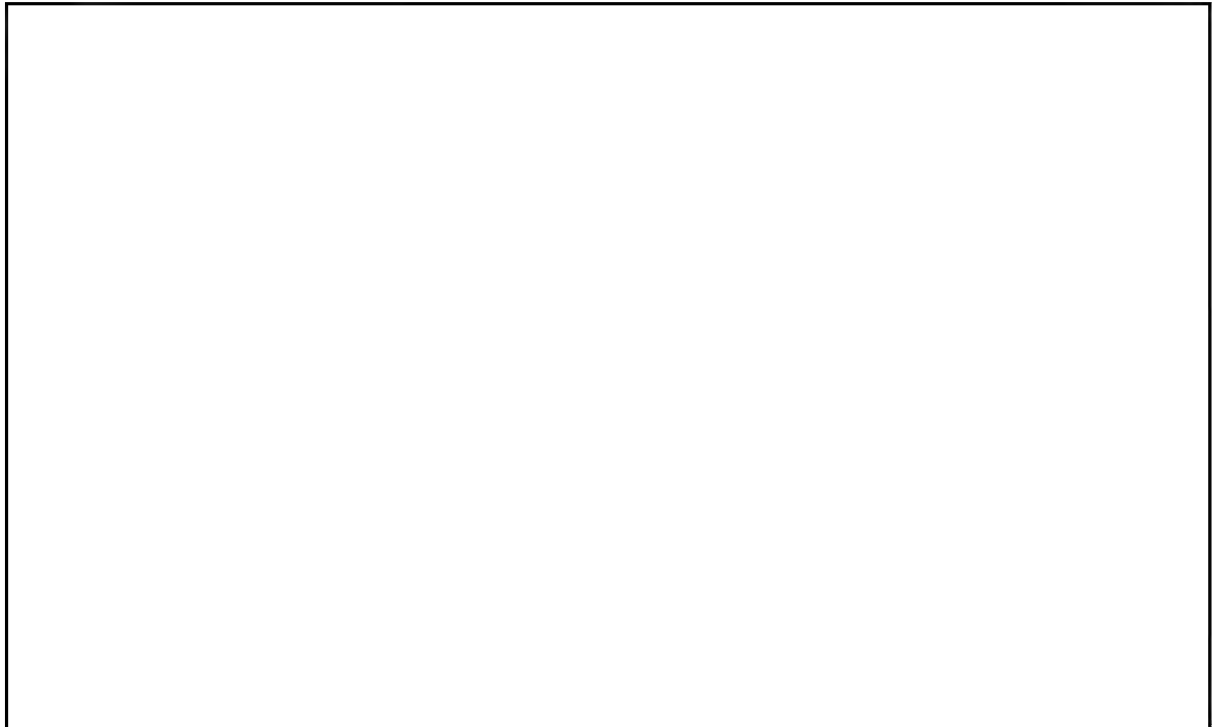
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evidence, that Hanoi had flagrantly violated the Geneva Agreements on Laos. These agreements called for complete withdrawal of all DRV forces and prohibited their reintroduction, as well as banning DRV military bases in Laos, shipping war material to the Communists, and political interference in Laotian internal affairs. This study traced the violations in detail, noting that about 10,000 regular DRV troops were introduced into Laos to bolster the Communist position there by 1962 and all indications were that substantial DRV forces remained in Laos and were still active. Hanoi also interfered directly and indirectly in the internal affairs of Laos through its continued general control of the Communist Pathet Lao (PL), one of the factions within the coalition government. In addition Hanoi attempted

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requested by the Chairman, the State Member of USIB agreed to look into a request from Assistant Secretary of State Manning for all information on North Vietnamese involvement in Laos and Vietnam. 112/



79. At the 19 June USIB meeting after hearing a brief report by the State Member that the request by Assistant Secretary Manning referred to at the 17 June meeting had been sent to DIA and CIA, the Board agreed with Mr. McCone that the response to this request should be a comprehensive USIB intelligence memorandum on the subject of North Vietnamese intervention in Laos and South Vietnam, to be

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prepared by BNE and the USIB representatives. 114/ Accordingly two separate memorandanda, one on Vietnam and the other on Laos, were considered and approved by the USIB at its 24 June meeting.

These memoranda were essentially an updating of the previous studies on North Vietnamese violations of the Geneva Agreements on Vietnam and Laos approved by USIB in March and April 1964. 115/ While

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83. As in other critical areas and situations, information derived from overhead reconnaissance was an essential input to national intelligence on Vietnam and Laos. Consequently, the Committee on Overhead Reconnaissance had a key role in stating the requirements and reviewing the collection effort in its field during this period. Most of its reports to USIB on Vietnam and Laos were of this character, although COMOR also submitted many recommendations related to the security handling of the information regarding this program. These recommendations dealt with such matters as the release of photographs or the information derived from them to selected U.S. officials or foreign governments, security procedures for handling the photographs, and the security classification of the products from overflights of Southeast Asia.

84. The first of a series of COMOR reports during this period reviewing the intelligence requirements for photographic coverage of this area was based upon the results of a CIA/DIA team sent to South Vietnam by USIB in January 1964 to examine the existing photo reconnaissance system and recommend any improvements needed. 122/ The subsequent report by [REDACTED] was referred by the Chairman of USIB to COMOR for use in the preparation of an assessment of requirements for U-2 reconnaissance in South Vietnam and border areas of North Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia in connection with the current crisis there. The response by COMOR was

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considered and approved with amendments by USIB in February 1964. The five principal requirements in the [] report in summary were: (a) comprehensive photo coverage of South Vietnam to assess the extent, disposition and status of the strategic hamlet program, (b) regular surveillance of logistic routes from the DRV to SVN through Laos and Cambodia, (c) coverage of targets in Cambodia, Laos and the DRV involved in contingency planning, (d) timely tactical and post-strike reconnaissance against targets for which operations had been approved in the DRV and (e) R&D emphasis on improvement of infra-red photography and low-level color photography and the development of multi-sensor correlation techniques (these latter requirement were not evaluated by COMOR). The COMOR recommendations based on its evaluation of the first four requirements summarized above as approved by the USIB were: (a) comprehensive coverage of South Vietnam in connection with the strategic hamlet program, (b) preparation of a study (including an engineering analysis of the capability of pertinent roads from available photography of the road nets of concern, identifying important gaps for future coverage, (c) as near as possible daily coverage of roads and logistic routes from the DRV to SVN through Laos and Cambodia, the results to be subject to continuing analysis by MACV and the Washington intelligence community

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to determine whether the data required was of sufficient value to warrant continuation or modification of the program, and (d) pre- and post-strike reconnaissance of [] targets in the DRV. In discussing these recommendations Mr. McCone emphasized that, even if these requirements were approved, he did not want authorization for the program to give the President and the Secretary of Defense the impression that photographic reconnaissance, especially high-level, could collect all the information needed, particularly regarding VC supply routes and penetration. 123 /

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85. In April 1964 COMOR at the request of the Chairman of USIB submitted an evaluation of the collection efforts to meet the USIB-approved reconnaissance requirements stated above. This evaluation analyzed both the SAC and CIA IDEALIST missions over the areas concerned, and concluded that in terms of the Board's requirements: (a) the hamlet program coverage was now 75 percent completed and should be finished, (b) coverage of [] targets in the DRV appeared well along in terms of establishing base line coverage, leaving only MACV requests for pre-or post-strike coverage as appropriate, (c) critical roads in southern Laos should be covered daily as near as possible until sufficient data was available to assess what useful intelligence could be drawn from it and (d) IDEALIST should fly no further missions over

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the DRV and Laos unless CIA received an appropriate request (DIA however reaffirmed the need for coverage in areas inaccessible to SAC operations). USIB on 15 April approved these conclusions, subject to the understanding that the Director of NRO would request the Special Group to authorize SAC to cover ^{an} additional area of route 12 in Laos. The Board further agreed that the coverage contemplated under this action should continue for a couple of weeks, pending completion and review of analyses by CIA, NPIC and DIA as a basis for determining the need for future coverage. The Board also noted that the Chairman had requested a report on whether Cambodian IDEALIST flights were being tracked by Cambodian radar to determine whether to recommend Special Group authorization for SAC coverage of targets in the Cambodian border area. 124/

86. On 30 April 1964 COMOR in response to a request by Mr. McCone submitted to USIB recommendations on requirements for low-level reconnaissance over Laos, directed primarily toward coverage of routes 9 and 12A in southern Laos leading into or toward SVN. COMOR identified the following specific needs:

(a) confirming concentrations and movement of military equipment and personnel, (b) identifying and determining the quantity

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of artillery pieces, ammunition dumps, and vehicles at known or suspected assembly points and installations, (c) determining the status and pattern of activity at identified and suspected logistical facilities and (d) clarifying and establishing more definitive data regarding roads and trails possibly associated with infiltration into SVN. COMOR noted that MACV was currently aware of the increased number of VC operating in SVN and of increased logistical support. However he could not with available intelligence from existing collection methods identify the critical points within SVN against which SVN military action could be effectively taken. Consequently he needed more precise and timely identification of the critical points of interest into SVN. COMOR recommended and the Board approved on 1 May the above stated requirements. The Board however revised additional COMOR recommendations along the following lines: (b) recommended that authority be obtained for low-level reconnaissance to meet these requirements in the absence of other means for satisfying them, (c) recommended that such reconnaissance be accomplished by COMUSMACV in pursuance of his mission, limited to routes 9 and 12A and contiguous roads and trails, and (d) agreed that the intelligence community should make an appraisal as the products of this reconnaissance became available and report to the Board whether the information derived was as useful as expected. 125/

87. Later in May, CIA and DIA submitted to USIB, in response to the Board's action on 15 April, a preliminary analysis of truck traffic patterns in the DRV and Communist-held portions of Laos, which included the following conclusions. Aerial photography and reports from road watchers showed truck activity of sufficient magnitude to confirm the identification of the principal roads used to supply Communist forces in Laos. There was not a sufficient number of samples of truck activity on these routes to estimate with confidence the magnitude of this supply activity. If the days with complete photographic coverage were representative, traffic entering Laos over route 7 from the DRV was more than adequate to supply Communist forces in northern Laos, while there appeared to be enough trucks on route 12 to supply Communist forces in southern Laos. However not enough vehicles had been detected to estimate the daily logistic support intended for Communist forces in southern Laos as opposed to the amount for stockpiling or for the VC in SVN. If more reconnaissance missions were flown therefore they should be concentrated on certain routes identified in the study. Although road watch team reports were useful, they were not sufficient to compensate for deficiencies in photographic coverage. 126/

COMOR submitted comments on this CIA/DIA analysis which concluded that: (a) a conclusive judgment on whether daily road coverage should be continued must await final assessment based on available materials, (b) such final assessment might permit establishment of a useful base of information for appraising future movements, and/or pending this assessment, daily U-2 photography of the selected routes should be continued insofar as weather permitted. The USIB on 20 May approved these conclusions subject to the revision of a footnote to conclusion (c) to read as follows: "It should be noted that useful truck traffic analysis can only be made from useable photography which provides substantial coverage at any one time of the routes of interest. This observation should not be interpreted however as a restriction on the scheduling of flights to provide the coverage specified in that paragraph". This footnote was based in part on observations made at the meeting by [] that this reconnaissance effort proved conclusively that trucks could be seen and counted in this type of aerial photography, and that useful analysis of truck traffic could be made from this reconnaissance. He noted however that to do this a larger sample of information was needed than that currently available to the analyst, and that they needed a substantial sample from a single mission or a number of missions at approximately the same time covering each route. 127/

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88. CIA and DIA in August 1964 prepared another analysis of truck traffic over selected routes in the DRV and Laos, which DIA referred to COMOR. This analysis based on recent aerial photography and road watch reports contained new conclusions which in summary indicated that, even though they had been able to confirm the principal routes in use and to obtain over a rough measure of the trucks moving /them from these sources, several problems had been encountered in their use so that little reliance could be placed on the magnitude of truck traffic indicated as moving over them. Accordingly, although these sources served various other purposes, they had not been of much value in ensuring the volume and cycle of truck movements which could be used in producing specific estimates of enemy capabilities and intentions. Taking account of the many operational problems, the analysis suggested that consideration be given to revised intelligence requirements, the most important of which were: (a) establishing ground-observation posts at particular locations to provide consistent coverage of priority routes, (b) including additional details in the ground-observer reports, (c) treating the priority routes which carry truck traffic as photographic targets and covering them as fully as possible when photographic missions

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are flown over them, (d) programming photographic missions to follow the entire length of the routes rather than to crisscross the routes, (e) reporting / percent of route visible in photography for each mission and the unduplicated number of trucks on that portion, and (f) increasing the coverage of priority routes by both ground and aerial observation to at least ten days per month, choosing days that would provide a random sample. In transmitting this analysis, the DIA member of COMOR requested that the committee note and approve the study, particularly the revised intelligence requirements. He specifically cited the proposed plan for coverage of priority routes which carried truck traffic, and the proposed mode of programming photo missions to follow the entire length of the routes rather than crisscrossing them, which he suggested be referred to SAC and MACV for implementation. He also requested that NPIC revise reporting procedures in accordance with the report's recommendations, and that the report be forwarded to USIB for notation and approval. COMOR's comments indicated that they considered the proposed plan for coverage of priority routes to be sound, but did not propose any other changes to present requirements.

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COMOR therefore suggested that DIA request SAC and MACV to revise their aerial reconnaissance procedures accordingly. The DIA memorandum to COMOR and its enclosed analyses, together with the COMOR comments were circulated to the USIB for information and noting if there was no objection. The only comment was by the Acting CIA Member of USIB who stated that his noting of this USIB paper should not be construed as committing NPIC to any particular degree of effort. 128/ In March 1965 COMOR, referring to the above USIB actions, advised the Board that in December it had considered the need for continuation of near-daily coverage of key routes in North Vietnam for the purpose of truck traffic analysis. It had been decided at that time that the continued requirement for such an analysis to be conducted in Washington did not exist. NPIC advised that no requirement was currently levied on it/ ^{for} maintaining of truck traffic data. It was now NPIC's practice to rescan new materials received from photographic coverage of roads and targets in the DRV, reporting to the community only when something not previously reported was identified. COMOR concluded that (a) photo reconnaissance in Southeast Asia was now primarily responsive to the requirements of COMUSMACV, CINCPAC, and the National Command Authorities, (b) COMOR, on behalf of USIB, established for the record that the previous stated requirement for near-daily

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coverage solely for the purpose of a road traffic analysis survey no longer existed and (c) COMOR would through DIA request target coverage as it might require to meet special needs. 128A/

89. The final USIB action during this period with respect to requirements for overhead reconnaissance of Vietnam and Laos occurred at the last Board meeting chaired by Mr. McCone on 28 April 1965. At that meeting the Director of DIA tabled a memorandum for USIB consideration regarding a requirement for low-level reconnaissance coverage of the DRV North of 21°. General Carroll stated that the current U-2 high altitude reconnaissance effort in Southeast Asia, particularly against targets in North Vietnam North of 21°, was not providing ^{an}adequate base of intelligence information to assess the character or extent of Communist China's support of the DRV. This reconnaissance was inadequate in frequency and quality of coverage necessary to provide information on the various categories of Bloc equipment, including SAM's, arriving in the DRV. The U-2 was hampered primarily by severely deteriorating weather environment and prognostications. This deficiency was further aggravated by the inadequate reconnaissance effort currently directed against key airfields, naval ports, and military staging and supply bases in South China. He concluded that it was apparent that high-altitude

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reconnaissance alone could not meet the needs in this critical area during the next few months, and that reconnaissance below 8,000 feet offered ^{an} immediately responsive and improved opportunity to bridge and mitigate this rapidly developing deficiency. . . Accordingly, in consideration of urgent national need for timely and adequate intelligence during the current period of air strikes by the US against the DRV, General Carroll recommended that the USIB endorse the requirement for low-level reconnaissance in the areas of the DRV North of 21° as a supplement to U-2 operations. After discussion regarding the reasons (primarily weather) for falling short of stated USIB (drone) requirements by U-2, BLUE SPRINGS/KH-7 and KH-4 means, USIB endorsed this requirement for low-level reconnaissance as recommended by General Carroll. 129/

90. In addition to these COMOR reports on intelligence requirements for overhead reconnaissance, the Critical Collection Problems Committee submitted to USIB during this period two comprehensive studies appraising intelligence collection capabilities with respect to Vietnam and Laos. The first of these studies stemmed from the Post-Mortem on the March 1964 SNIE on the Outlook for North Vietnam. . . At the 4 March USIB meeting when this estimate was approved, there was extensive discussion and criticism of the

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related post-mortem, primarily because it involved a critique of intelligence collection and processing instead of restricting itself to pointing out intelligence gaps. USIB therefore agreed to withdraw all copies of this draft post-mortem, and direct BNE with the USIB Representatives to produce another version which confined itself to a critique of intelligence deficiencies. It was also agreed that, after submittal to the USIB, the new post-mortem would be referred to the CCPC for recommendations concerning collection actions. The further discussion at this meeting however resulted in a directive to BNE to review the overall problem of post-mortems and submit recommendations to make them more useful. 130/ Based on this review, the USIB on 24 June approved the following guidelines for preparing post-mortems: (a) they should be produced selectively when serious gaps and deficiencies were encountered affecting the quality and completeness of national intelligence on important topics, (b) BNE consulting with the USIB representatives would normally determine whether a post-mortem should be initiated but any USIB Member could request one, (c) in preparing estimates, the question of a post-mortem should be kept in mind with specific information gaps passed to collection components immediately and the draft post-mortem

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forwarded to USIB at the same time as the draft estimate whenever practicable, and (d) post-mortems should enumerate important intelligence gaps and deficiencies, leaving to USIB, and through USIB to the CCPC and to member agencies, the responsibility for remedial measures. 131/ Under these selective guidelines, only seven post-mortems were approved by USIB in the 15-month period up to September 1965 when supplementary procedures/were adopted by the Board.

91. Pursuant to the previously mentioned Board action on 15 April 1964, the CCPC transmitted to USIB in May a report on intelligence coverage of North Vietnam containing recommendations to overcome deficiencies identified in the post-mortem on the SNIE regarding the outlook for North Vietnam. These recommendations included a series of proposed collection actions with respect to SIGINT, prisoners and defectors, clandestine collection, broadcasts and publications, visitors to North Vietnam, North Vietnamese living abroad, and other governments. In view of the importance of obtaining prompt and coordinated action, the CCPC also proposed that agencies having implementing responsibilities regarding these recommendations report their actions to the CCPC as a basis for an interim report to USIB within 90 days. The USIB on 3 June approved

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with amendments the CCPC recommendations. 132/ The interim report by CCPC on the status of actions by USIB agencies to carry out these approved recommendations was noted by the Board in October 1964. 133/

92. The second major study related to Vietnam by the CCPC during this period was in response to a memorandum from the DCI in February 1965 expressing his belief that urgent attention should be given to the problem of possible large-scale intervention in South Vietnam by the military forces of North Vietnam acting alone or in conjunction with the Chinese Communists. Accordingly he requested the CCPC to review all capabilities for the collection of information relevant to this subject and submit appropriate recommendations. The CCPC response as submitted to USIB on 15 March examined the problems in three major phases of enemy activity: (a) the decision to intervene on a large scale, (b) the preparations for such intervention and (c) the movement of armed forces into attack positions. The capabilities of SIGINT, clandestine resources, overhead and peripheral reconnaissance and overt resources to provide on each of these phases necessary intelligence for advanced warning and adequate knowledge of enemy activity were analyzed. For the first phase it was concluded that there was only the most remote possibility that

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any available collection capability would report on the intention or decision to attack. The second phase, preparation for attack, was more susceptible to collection efforts by SIGINT, clandestine assets, high altitude photography if weather permitted, and medium and low level photography with greater assurance. The third phase, actual movement of Communist forces, would probably be detected and reported by clandestine assets. SIGINT might collect certain phases. High-altitude photography could not be counted upon primarily because of infrequent coverage, but medium or low level if used frequently would provide greater chance of detecting military movements. CCPC saw evidence of continuing and expanding efforts to improve capabilities against China and the DRV, particularly for identifying major military moves in Southeast Asia. The CCPC believed however that the following actions, some already in progress, would enhance overall capabilities for a maximum effort against this critical target: (a) supplement current high-altitude reconnaissance by a regular program of medium and low level coverage using photographic and other sensors, (b) surveillance of ports of entry of the DRV and coastal waters of SVN and Cambodia by U.S. forces, (c) completion as soon as possible of the programmed build-up of SIGINT resources at Southeast Asia mainland sites, and (4) priority

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procurement and implacement of devices to report on vehicle and railroad traffic within the DRV. The CCPC recommended USIB agreement with these actions, as well as the following long-term actions to (a) support local tribal elements in Northern Laos and expand such assets into the DRV and China for intelligence purposes, and (b) initiate a CIA study in conjunction with Defense of the use inside Communist China of Chinese Nationalist paramilitary teams to expand early warning coverage. The USIB on 18 March after discussion remanded the paper to the CCPC for revision to include an evaluation of the ability to provide warning, not only of large scale overt invasion, but also of increased large scale infiltration into South Vietnam by small groups over a period of time which could result in a covert Communist buildup large enough to confront and overwhelm the SVN armed forces. Mr. McCone agreed however that there was no objection if any action agency began implementing the CCPC recommendations prior to Board consideration of the revised paper. 134/

93. The revised CCPC report in summary consisted of the same conclusions and recommendations regarding large-scale armed forces infiltration as in the previous version, subject to the following additional statements related to covert infiltration. Current

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capabilities should be able to detect a significant step-up of personnel and materiel infiltration, but there was little likelihood that they could give any accurate indication of the increased strength or its specific objectives. As intensified insurgency and counter-insurgency increased within SVN, however, the opportunity to acquire more VC prisoners who might provide specific information would improve. The CCPC added as an additional recommended action the major practicable expansion of operations to: (a) penetrate Communist infiltration mechanisms, (b) detect infiltration movement by increasing road watchers and surveillance of critical staging areas, and (c) capture knowledgeable individuals. The USIB on 24 March approved the CCPC conclusions and recommendations in this revised report essentially as submitted except that the action regarding devices to report on vehicle and railroad traffic within the DRV was modified to call for priority examination of their availability and effectiveness instead of priority procurement and placement. These approved conclusions and recommendations were disseminated separately and not as an integral part of the subject paper, since Dr. Cline as Acting CIA Member pointed out that the rest of the CCPC paper implied a higher degree of assurance of advance warning than was felt by

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CIA analysts. The USIB also agreed to review at its next meeting all available photographic reconnaissance assets and capabilities and how they were being used to cover North Vietnam, South China and Laos, on the basis of a DIA briefing on tactical reconnaissance supplemented by a COMOR report. 135/

94. Two other special studies were prepared pursuant to USIB instructions as a result of discussion of the Watch Report at the 13 January 1965 Board meeting relative to a "probable" or "possible" move of a DRV division element from the DRV to south Laos near the SVN border. This discussion prompted Mr. McCone to voice his concern that the policy makers might not be taking full account of the possible implications of reported Communist efforts to strengthen their military position in Laos and Vietnam. After considering the possible need for a SNIE, Mr. McCone asked the National Indications Center to compile and collate all indications of Communist military actions in the Southeast Asia area for study by USIB. 136/ When this NIC Summary of Indications 137/ was considered at the 22 January Board meeting, Dr. R. J. Smith as Acting Chairman of the Watch Committee pointed out that the NIC compilation of indicators properly did not make any assessments or draw any conclusions. He said that CIA therefore had used the NIC

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material to produce an assessment which the Board might want to note or, after coordination, issue as a USIB document. Mr. McCone suggested that the Board also consider following these two papers with a SNIE on possible or probable Communist intentions. Consequently USIB agreed that a SNIE should be produced in the shortest reasonable time on the near term prospects for Indochina, which subsequently was issued in February under the subject of Communist Military Capabilities and Near-Term Intentions in Laos and South Vietnam.* The Board also asked Dr. R. J. Smith to arrange for the immediate preparation, in consultation with USIB representatives, of a coordinated USIB intelligence memorandum on Communist Military Posture and Capabilities vis-a-vis Southeast Asia, for approval by the Board. 138/ This memorandum as concurred in by USIB on 26 January 1965 noted in summary that, since the Tonkin Gulf incident in August 1964, the Chinese Communists had stepped up efforts to improve their military posture in South China, particularly their air defense capabilities. There had been no significant Chinese ground force deployments, but those already within 200 miles of the Sino-DRV border were capable of conducting major ground operations and they could be heavily reinforced within a few weeks. Recently significant

*See summary in paragraph 66 above.

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Communist troop movements had been noted in Laos, concentrated in the northern panhandle. Although such reinforcement occurred each year after the rainy season, the focus was farther south and the totals probably exceeded estimates in recent years. This deployment had improved Communist capability to defend their positions, as well as to undertake offensive operations and to supply reinforcements for the VC. 139/

95. The concentration of effort placed by the USIB during this entire period on developments in and related to Vietnam and Laos foreshadowed the expanding scope and escalating severity of the struggle throughout the ensuing years. There was hardly any Board meeting during these 17 months when the increasingly critical situation regarding these areas was not appraised in terms of the Watch Report, SNIEs, intelligence requirements, collection capabilities, additional resources, and protection of sources and methods. Special requests were levied at an accelerating pace by the President, NSC, and other policy makers or operating officials for such intelligence support, much of which had to be coordinated at the USIB level. In sum, the USIB during this period was a key element in providing essential advice and assistance with respect to Vietnam and Laos required in the interests of U.S. national security.

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